

St Stephen's Church Warden and Chair of the Village Shop Association, Alastair Barron

St Stephen's Church

It has been a turbulent year due to the restrictions on the use of the church imposed by Government and the Church because of Covid 19 and this has impacted our ability to be open and to hold services. Our priority has been the safety of those taking services, those working in and around the church and our congregation. We think this has been the right priority but it has been frustrating !

We have, though, been able to hold some services once a month during some periods in the year, in conjunction with other churches in the Downs Benefice and we have been able, again at times during the year, to open the church on Sundays and Wednesdays for personal prayer and reflection.

We have sought to stay in touch with our church family through our benefice website and our Rector has sent a weekly letter to over 500 people around the Benefice. She has also kept in touch by phone with those for whom some pastoral support was thought to be helpful, being unable to visit in person. The church has also participated, with the PCC and the Shop, in the Village Support Team, which responded to the virus by offering practical help, particularly to those shielding or who otherwise needed some assistance.

We are now holding more services and the church is, again, open for prayer and reflection on Sundays and Wednesdays. We continue to hope for a cautious return to normality and restored and regular use of our much-loved village church.

Meanwhile, stay safe and God bless.

Sparsholt Village Shop and Post Office

We are proud to say that the Village Shop and Post Office has remained open during this difficult year – a valiant effort on the part of many. Changes to the way we operate have had to be made by Janette, Fiona and the team but the shop has played a real part in Sparsholt's response to the virus. Our opening hours have been shortened and changed, we have moved the shop outside to be able to work safely and, particularly during the first lockdown, we joined the PCC, the Church in the Sparsholt Support Team supporting the village by selling a wide range of healthy, fresh and packaged goods and by delivering groceries, and on occasions medicines, to those who were unable to get out.

It has been a strong year financially, finishing with an operating profit of some £3,000. Our trading volumes and numbers are now returning to more normal levels and so we are now looking at how we run and manage the shop going forward so, as before, we can continue to support the village.

So, a big thank you to all those who supported the Shop and Post Office in any way, staff, volunteers and the customers, and we look forward to a busy 2021